TIME SALVATION: OLIPHANT VS. DURAND

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FOREWORD

The **debate between Elder J.H. Oliphant and Elder Silas H. Durand** over **Conditional Time Salvation** took place **primarily between the late 1890s and early 1900s**—a time of growing tension among **Primitive Baptists** over how to interpret obedience, temporal blessings, and grace.
Here are some details:

Timeline Summary:

- **Early to Mid-1890s**: Oliphant begins writing more openly about the concept of a "conditional salvation in time," based on verses like 1 Timothy 4:16.
- **Late 1890s**: Silas Durand, once sympathetic to Oliphant's language, begins to push back more strongly. He becomes concerned that such terminology opens the door to **Arminianism** or **two salvations**.
- **By 1900**: The exchange between the two becomes more pointed, with published letters and articles in Primitive

Baptist periodicals like *The Signs of the Times* and *The Primitive Monitor*.
- **1903–1905**: Most of the best-known letters were circulated during these years. Durand became firmer in his opposition.

 Context of the Disagreement:
- **Oliphant's Position**: He believed that while eternal salvation is by grace, there is a **conditional experience of salvation in time**—deliverance, peace, and fellowship with God—that depends on obedience.
- **Durand's Response**: He argued that using "salvation" language for this conditional experience was misleading and potentially heretical. He preferred to speak of **blessings** or **fellowship**, not "time salvation."

Durand feared that this terminology would mislead saints into thinking their efforts could somehow earn or maintain salvation, even if only "in time."

Elder James Oliphant
Absolutely—**Elder John H. Oliphant** was a significant figure in the **Primitive Baptist** tradition during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He is best known for his clear, often pastoral writings, his role in defending Old School Baptist principles, and his controversial stance on what later became known as **Conditional Time Salvation (CTS)**.

 Basic Facts
- **Full Name**: John H. Oliphant
- **Lifespan**: ca. 1830s–early 1900s
- **Location**: Primarily associated with churches in **Indiana and Kentucky**
- **Occupation**: Primitive Baptist Elder, publisher, and writer
- **Known For**: Debates, doctrinal articles, books on theology and church practice

📖 Theological Views

➤ Unconditional Eternal Salvation

Like all Old School/Primitive Baptists, Oliphant held tightly to the doctrine of **sovereign grace**:

- Eternal election by God
- Salvation by Christ alone, accomplished and applied by the Holy Spirit
- No human conditions attached to eternal life

➤ Conditional Time Salvation

Oliphant distinguished between:

- **Eternal salvation**: God's unchangeable work in Christ
- **Time salvation**: Deliverances, peace, and joy in this life that **depend on the believer's obedience**

He believed that this "time salvation" was **taught in the Bible**—not as a second kind of salvation, but as a real category for understanding the believer's walk.

From Oliphant:

"There are blessings promised to the obedient, and there are chastenings for the disobedient; this is a salvation that is experienced here in time."

His language caused controversy, especially with **Silas Durand**, who thought it blurred the lines between grace and works.

✍️ Writings and Publications

Oliphant wrote:

- **Debates and letters**—especially with Silas Durand and other elders
- Doctrinal treatises explaining his views on salvation, church practice, and the Christian walk
- Contributions to Primitive Baptist periodicals like *Zion's Advocate* and *Signs of the Times*

He was known for being **gentle but firm**, and his tone was often more irenic than polemical—even when disagreeing.

📚 Notable Works and Exchanges

- **"Letters Between Elders Oliphant and Durand"** – A well-known series of letters discussing CTS and scriptural interpretation
- **"Oliphant's Correspondence"** – Some collections include his doctrinal letters, addressing gospel regeneration, church order, and the work of the Spirit

You can find these in archives like:

- PB Anthology
- *The Remnant*
- Occasionally reprinted in modern Primitive Baptist publications

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⚖ **His Legacy**

Elder Oliphant represents a **bridge** between:

- The older, more cautious Old School Baptists (like Samuel Trott or Silas Durand)
- The later Progressive Primitive Baptists (like John R. Daily), who embraced CTS more systematically

While he never fully adopted the elaborate two-salvation framework of later generations, **his terminology and interpretation helped pave the way for it**.

Silas Durand

Absolutely—**Silas H. Durand (1833–1922)** was one of the most respected theologians and writers among **Old School Primitive Baptists** in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Known for his sharp intellect, deep reverence for Scripture, and commitment to sovereign grace, Durand stood firmly against the doctrinal innovations he believed threatened the integrity of the gospel—including the idea of **Conditional Time Salvation (CTS)** when it was expressed in overly formalized or misleading terms.

 Quick Overview

- **Full Name**: Silas Hazard Durand

- **Born**: 1833 (New Jersey)
- **Died**: 1922
- **Occupation**: Primitive Baptist elder, theologian, writer, and editor
- **Churches**: Primarily in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic (e.g., Pennsylvania, New Jersey)

📖 Theology and Beliefs

➤ Eternal Salvation by Sovereign Grace

Durand was a strong proponent of:

- **Total depravity**
- **Unconditional election**
- **Particular redemption**
- **Effectual calling and preservation of the saints**

He emphasized that salvation is **entirely the work of God**, from beginning to end, **with no conditions on the sinner**.

➤ Concern Over "Conditional Time Salvation"

Durand **originally used language like "salvation in time"** in a general sense—meaning deliverance from trials or correction by God—but he **later rejected the idea** of formally dividing salvation into "eternal" and "time" categories in a doctrinal way.

He said:

"I have come to feel that the use of such phrases as 'conditional time salvation' are dangerous, misleading, and without support in the Scriptures."

Durand's fear was that such language would **undermine grace** by suggesting that human obedience had a salvific quality—even if only "in time."

✍ Writings and Correspondence

Durand wrote extensively, and his correspondence is especially important.

📚 Key Writings:

- **"Letters on Doctrinal Subjects"** – Collected letters dealing with various aspects of Primitive Baptist theology.

- **Letters with J.H. Oliphant** – A famous series where Durand critiques the rising language of CTS and urges caution.
- Articles published in **Signs of the Times** and other Primitive Baptist periodicals.

He often employed **careful biblical exegesis** and emphasized consistency with Old Baptist confessions and the historic gospel.

His View on Obedience and Christian Life

Durand strongly affirmed that:

- Obedience is important.
- God chastens His children.
- There is **blessing or sorrow in this life** tied to walking in God's ways.

BUT—he insisted that **none of this is properly called "salvation."** To him, the word "salvation" should be **reserved for what Christ accomplished**.

Famous Quotes

"I have no confidence in a salvation that depends upon me—even in time."

"The believer does not work out salvation. He works because God works in him, and that itself is the evidence of a salvation already secured."

⚖ **Legacy**

Durand is remembered as:

- A **doctrinal guardrail** for the Primitive Baptist community
- A **loving, thoughtful elder** who cared deeply about guarding the gospel from subtle error
- Someone who tried to maintain unity without sacrificing truth

His influence continues in the **Strict/Old-Line Primitive Baptist churches**, many of whom reject formal CTS today and follow his cautionary example.

Guillermo Santamaria

TIME SALVATION, J. H. Oliphant vs. Silas Durand. Silas Durand began preaching not long after the Civil War and continued to preach well into the Twentieth Century. He was one of the most articulate and influential of all preachers. Some of us have spent many happy hours reading his writings. Like Gilbert Beebe and other Absoluters, he could be very edifying and instructive, so long as he stayed away from some of his fatalistic ideas.

In his earlier ministry, like any sound Primitive Baptist in any age, he defended what he called “conditional salvation inside the church.” In his later ministry, he reversed himself and began to deny what he had once preached, and accused those who advocated what we call time salvation of advocating a new and strange thing. That seems to be always the pattern: when someone abandons the truth, he accuses those who oppose his departure of coming up with a new doctrine.

I have before me a copy of his correspondence with Elder J. H. Oliphant. In this little book, Elder Oliphant points out that what Silas Durand calls a new and strange thing is nothing more than the very doctrine Durand had himself once preached.

Elder Oliphant says, “In the Monitor of October you say, ‘In the beginning of my ministry I sometimes spoke of a ‘conditional’ salvation inside the church, referring to the fact that only when we are walking in obedience to the commands of Jesus can we enjoy the power and comfort of that salvation.’ In my letter to you, I do not think I contended for more or less than is contained in this quotation. Had you not shifted your position, you would have the hearty endorsement of our brethren now.” Elder Durand had abandoned the doctrine of conditional (time) salvation he once preached, and many Primitive Baptists abandoned him. Elder Oliphant pointed out that the Primitive Baptists had abandoned him because he had abandoned his former doctrine.

It is safe to say that, no matter how sound in the faith, nor how edifying a minister might once have been, nor how sound he may still be with regard to other doctrines, the Bible instruction is clear. “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him godspeed, for he that biddeth him godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds,” 1 John 1:10,11. If he is known to preach falsehood, we must not invite him into our pulpit.

Elder Durand was a prolific and effective writer. He was known and respected wherever there were Primitive Baptists. Till this very day, his writings are still being republished and distributed. But we must not let that move us. Paul tells us, “But though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed,” Gal. 1:8. And then, not being satisfied with having barely stated it, he will not let it rest; he says it again, “As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed,” vs 9.

It is hard to imagine how Paul could have found any stronger language than he did. We are living in an age when people do not believe doctrine is important. Paul emphasized the importance of doctrine by calling down a woe on anybody who preached any other gospel. As forceful and articulate as Silas Durand was, his ministry underscored the danger of departing from the Bible standard.

If there is no such thing as time salvation, there is no basis for exhorting the congregation to exert themselves in the service of the Lord. To say it another way, if everything that will ever happen was fixed and determined before the world began, we are all reduced to mere spectators in the grand scheme of things.

You will notice in the quotes to follow that Durand is more consistent than most halfhearted Absoluters. Since he is so sure that God has already predestinated everything— both good and evil—that will ever happen, he insists there is nothing to be gained in obedience, nothing to be lost in disobedience.

He is sure there is no reason to fear that God will punish us for our disobedience, no reason to exhort or encourage the saints. If ever there was a doctrine calculated to destroy lives—and churches—that doctrine is it.

Granted, most of those who deny the reality of time salvation continue to exhort the faithful, but exhorting people to good works at the same time you insist that every result is already determined is like mounting a flywheel off-center and trying to make it run smoothly. If you mount it off-center, there is a good chance it is going to vibrate.

And if you tell people there is nothing to be lost in disobedience, no reason to fear God will punish them, there is a good chance they will transgress.

But listen to these two men as they debate the question. The emphasis is added.

Objection to the term Conditional time salvation

Durand: Before the expression “conditional time salvation” had been used in any Old Baptist publication, so far as I know, I had sometimes spoken of a “conditional salvation inside of the church,” but do not remember writing it. I soon saw, as I thought, that I was not warranted in the use of that word, that it did not express the truth of doctrine and experience. Concerning that doctrine and experience, my mind did not change, but only as to the propriety of using that word to express the salvation that is experienced in time, while walking in the paths of righteousness.

Oliphant; You would refuse the terms “free will” and “free moral agency” because they have been so long used with an unscriptural meaning, and say, “The Bible terms will do for us;” but you do not apply this rule to the expression, “The absolute predestination of all things,” and which seem to the most of our brethren to teach a very objectionable sentiment. I still complain of your position, because it strips man of all WILL or CHOICE, in his conduct as truly as if he were a tree or a stone. In your reply you say, “That is true,” admitting that men are as destitute of will in their actions as a tree, because the prophet uses the figure “Trees of righteousness” and you accept the comparison of a Christian to a stone without any will, because Peter speaks of them as “lively stones.”

Removes the distinction between right and wrong

Durand: If the Lord works in them that which is well pleasing in his sight, and if they declare by inspiration that he has wrought all their works in them, what more outside works can there be? I do not suppose such thoughts would occur to one except upon the supposed necessity in order to defend a conditional salvation.

Oliphant: You quote the text, “for thou also hast wrought all our works in us.” What do you understand by the words “all our works?” Did God work in David’s works in his behavior with Uriah and his wife, in him? Did he work Peter’s conduct in denying his Lord, in him? You complain of a heart deceitful and desperately wicked. Did God work all this deceitfulness in you? You quote this text several times as if it were your main reliance.

If all our sins and wickedness are wrought in us by the Lord, then wherein does right differ from wrong? You also quote Heb. 13:20,21, “Working in them that which is well pleasing in his sight.” Is there anything in or about God’s people that is not well pleasing in his sight? Paul mentions some, 1 Cor. 10:5, “With many of them God was not well pleased.” If every work was wrought in them, how does it occur that God was not well pleased with them? In Heb. 13:16, “With such sacrifices God is well pleased.” But if God is pleased with all our conduct and all our ways, why mention that with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

There is as much difference between right and wrong as there is between heaven and hell, and yet you do not make a distinction, that I can see.

Oliphant: I have all my life heard Baptists affirm that regeneration is unconditional and independent of our choice. We become sons and heirs unconditionally, but as His sons, we are under a parental or disciplinary government, which is conditional. We may be tried and even burned, but a

good conscience can only be maintained by paying the price of its maintenance, and a good conscience is of great value. My own experience is that doing wrong is widely different from doing right.

Denies the reality of obedience

Durand: What has our will to do with our love, or with our belief? We cannot of ourselves will to do either, neither is it of our will that we keep the commandments.

Oliphant: You say, “Neither is it of our will (or choice) that we keep the commandments.” If you are right in this, there is no such thing as obedience; if we pay any attention to the meaning of the word obedience, you make a sad blunder when you say, “Neither is it of our will,” etc. In your plan, God’s government of his people is like the boy’s government of his marbles. You may say, “Neither is it of the will of the marble that it is in the right place.” Your theory requires a new dictionary, made expressly to suit your doctrine.

Oliphant: Obedience is a virtue, and disobedience a sin, but it was no virtue in Lazarus to come to life, and no sin to remain dead. Obedience is not the act of an inert, lifeless body, but the intelligent, willing act of a conscious being. It is a MORAL ACT concerning MORAL LAW, while quickening into life is the independent act of God, and is not a moral act.

Durand: Again, you remind me that my “theory” strips man of will [or] choice as fully as a tree in its bearing or not bearing fruit. That is true; that figure is also used more than once in describing the Lord’s people in their gospel state. They are “trees of righteousness,” and he will be glorified in the fruit they shall bear; Isa. 61:3. They are branches of Christ, the true Vine, and he says, “From me is thy fruit found.” His will is effectually wrought in them. He will “make them perfect to do his will, working in them that which is well pleasing in his sight,” and he shall be glorified in them; Heb. 13:21.

He insists salvation in time is never optional

Durand: He never invites. The word “invite” is never used by him, nor concerning him, in the Scriptures. He calls, and his call is always obeyed. He speaks, not to the ear, but to the heart, and his word never returns to him void, but accomplishes his will; Isa. 55:11. He describes those he calls as they are, “laboring and heavy laden,” unable to do any part of the work of satisfying the law, which presses them down under its condemning power, while they struggle under it, unable to rise. They can not go from sin to holiness, from the powers of darkness to him. But his call brings them.

Oliphant: You say the word “invite” is never used by him nor concerning him in the Scriptures. He calls, and his call is always obeyed.” Now read, “As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” He appeals to them in Christ’s stead. Is this always obeyed? And if our wills are in no sense connected with obedience, why does he use the words “beseech” and “pray?” If our obedience is of God, just as regeneration is of God, or just as the raising of Lazarus was of God, how is it that Paul uses the words “beseech” and “pray” in urging to obedience, if it is of God as regeneration is of God? While the word “invite” is not used here, yet the words “beseech” and “pray” suggest as much dependence on the will as the word “invite” would suggest.

He denies that anything is gained in obedience or lost in disobedience

Durand: There seems to prevail in the mind of some brethren, the worldly view of reward or a fear of punishment is necessary to compel obedience. Will any offered reward cause one to seek righteousness as he does who hungers for it? Will any fear of punishment turn one away from evil as effectively as a hatred of evil felt in the heart?

Durand: The principle now so much advocated of doing works of obedience for the reward which shall be given them, I decidedly distrust and oppose in myself or another.

Durand: In commenting on this, you say the Savior addresses his people as parents say to their children, “If you will obey me in this matter, I will give you a toy, or give you my approval.” Again, you say, “He presents motives, as if he would say, You need rest, you are laboring and heavy laden, and need rest. He plainly encourages them to obey by promising rest in case they obey.” I do not understand it at all.

Oliphant: In your effort to set aside the moral government of God, you find it essential to leave nothing in any way dependent on our wills in the matter of obedience, and hence, you must hold that his commands are always obeyed.

You say, “I have wondered why spiritually instructed men

should try to apply them to gospel things which are all made new. That was the form of the conditional covenant, and the conditional expressions are correctly quoted by you.” In this, you admit that God’s people were under a conditional state of things then, but not now, because things were not as certain then as now. How one can hold things uncertain under the old covenant, but certain now, and yet believe in the absolute predestination of all things, I cannot see.

Makes God the cause of all good and all evil

Durand: I do not find two kinds of predestination spoken of in the Bible or elsewhere. I do not understand that the difference you refer to between physical and moral government and necessity applies to this subject. If he works in them that which is well pleasing in his sight, can there be any uncertainty as to whether they will all please him in his own time?

Oliphant: You say, “I do not find two kinds of predestination spoken of in the Bible. You certainly admit that predestination is efficacious, causative, respecting our regeneration, creation, etc. So, if you know of but one kind of predestination, you would also hold that sin is also efficaciously predestinated. In your article in the Church Advocate, October, 1896, you say, “Can we think that he predestinated salvation, and all the times and ways of its experience and did not predestinate that which made it

necessary Did the Lord predestinate the rainbow and not the dark cloud in which he set it to display its glorious beauty?” From these and many of your expressions, we would understand you to hold that God is as much the cause of evil as he is of good; and what is this but to destroy the distinction between right and wrong?

He puts dragging in the place of leading

Durand: They feel a longing for this, but their own will and work will not lead them into that holy walk. It can only be as they “are led by the Spirit,” Gal. 5:18, and as Jesus walks in them, as he said, “I will dwell in them, and walk in them.”

Oliphant: You quote, “If ye be led by the Spirit,” etc. Gal. 4:18. The word led implies that those led are willing to be led. If the party led is not willing and active, then it will be a drag. So this word lead is fatal to your position that the will is not concerned in our obedience.

If any man will do his will,” John 7:17. So here again, the will is concerned in doing God’s will. Numberless places could be found showing the will to be concerned in obedience. Duty would mean nothing, and obedience would mean nothing if we excluded the will from them. Vice, virtue, right, or wrong might be excluded from every language under heaven, and man is reduced in his conduct to the level of a watch or a clock.

The fact is, when you deny the will of man being concerned in his obedience, you deny that man is a moral being. The planets obey the laws they are under, but not willingly; they are not moral beings. And so I understand you deny man the right to be a moral being. The words obey, disobey, vice, virtue, leads, led, duty, reward—all these words denote a dependence on the will, and I understand you to change the meaning of all these words to suit your notion of things.

He denies that the will is involved in obedience

Durand: I do not understand, as you assert, that the word if, as used in the New Testament, implies a condition. It is never used as expressing a dependence upon the will of the creature, as it is in the Old Testament.

Oliphant: But does the New Testament teach, as you insist, that the obedience of God’s people is independent of the will? You admit that in the Old Testament, obedience is dependent on the will. “If ye forsake the Lord and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt.” You seem to admit that in this command, the will is concerned. The Savior says, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love.” Can you see any difference in the form of these two commands? And if the will is concerned in the one, how can you say the will is not concerned in the other? Let anyone hunt out the

commands of God to Israel of old, and lay them down side by side with the commands of God to his people now, and show how or why the will is excluded from our conduct now, and was not excluded from their conduct. I am sure the form of expression is the same. It is the same God, and the people of God are now just what they were then, and so now, why should God's words to his people mean one thing in the Old Testament, and another in the New? The blessings from obedience in the Old Testament were all confined to time, and the curses for disobedience were all confined to time, and so it is now in the church. I think you are hard pressed if you espouse a theory that requires you to hold that the commands of God in the Old Testament were not all obeyed, but in the New Testament they are all obeyed.

Oliphant: See also Heb. 10:28, "He that despised Moses' law died under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy?" etc. Here, Paul again shows that the conditional covenant that Israel was under illustrates God's discipline over his people here, now, and shows that the antitype corresponds with the type.

He denies the word if indicates a condition

Durand: The word if does not, in my view, imply anywhere in the New Covenant a condition which may or may not be performed, and upon the performance of which, by us,

according to our will, depends our experience of favors and blessings of God.

Oliphant: The word “if” denotes conditionality, and it is frequently used in the New Testament. You say, “The Savior and his apostles do not say, ‘if you will, but ‘if you do.’ It is never used to show a dependence upon the will of the creature,” etc. But the Savior and his apostles do say, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine,” etc. If some dependence is not here expressed, what sentence would express dependence on the will? Also, “If ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts,” etc.

Oliphant: Paul does not say that God will make his children perfect, as you quote, but he earnestly invokes God TO DO SO! I must kindly protest against your dropping the words “In every good work” from Paul’s words. It would be unimportant had you not dared anyone to say that the sins of David and Jonah, and Peter were contrary to God’s will! Paul petitioned, or desired that God would “Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight.” But you would have us understand that God’s will is as effectually wrought in their disobedience as in their obedience, and that “From him is their fruit found.”

We are moral beings subject to moral law

Oliphant; Paul not only prays God to perfect his brethren, but also exhorts and beseeches them, sometimes with tears and anguish of heart, to a righteous course; to take earnest heed to themselves; to quench not the Spirit; to grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby they are sealed unto the day of redemption. He speaks of doing despite the Spirit of grace, and of sinning willfully after we have received a knowledge of the truth. If we are as destitute of choice, or will, or incapable of any intelligent activity as a stone or a tree, how can we do any of these things or be benefited by exhortation? Inanimate objects, like a stone or a tree, can make no response, for they are not moral beings; but men are, and choice is one of the essentials of that state. If men are not moral beings, there would be no moral government; and as such terms as “right” and “wrong” belong to moral government, I see no reason, your theory being true, why these works might not have been left out of all language.

Oliphant: In regeneration, we are passive, but in obedience, we are active. Resurrection is a physical act of God, but obedience is a willing, moral act of Jesus or his people. So there is a distinction between God’s decrees touching our obedience and our regeneration.

Oliphant: You must see there are many instances where conditions are expressed in the New Testament in the strongest possible manner; that some please God by keeping his commandments, while against the disobedient his wrath

is revealed. You know that the apostles would beseech and pray and exhort and warn to affect the conduct of men; and yet you insist that our happiness is in nowise conditional or dependent upon our walk, but that God’s will is effectually wrought whether we obey or disobey, and that our will is no more concerned in our obedience than the tree is in the bearing of fruit.